USDI, Bureau of Land Management
Burns District
28910 Hwy 20 West
Hines, Oregon 97738

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
for
East Warm Springs Allotment Management Plan/Agreement
Environmental Assessment
OR-025-04-067

INTRODUCTION

The East Warm Springs Allotment #7001 is located 25 miles south of Burns, Oregon. It is currently divided into 12 pastures of which 11 are small and 1 is very large. Several of the pastures have differing resource concerns. In 2004, monitoring data collected on the East Warm Springs Allotment over the past 10 years were analyzed through a formal interdisciplinary allotment evaluation process. The allotment evaluation analyzed whether or not management actions in place were causing resource objectives to be met.

The results of the allotment evaluation describe how several small seeding pastures have been used annually during the growing season to allow for deferment of the large native vegetation pasture. Using these pastures during the critical growth period for grasses without providing for rest periods has decreased forage production and plant vigor. The evaluation recommended that an additional spring use pasture be developed to balance the demand for spring forage with what was actually available on a sustainable basis.

The evaluation also includes an analysis of the Standards for Rangeland Health. Even though the present grazing system does not allow for ideal conditions in the small seeding pastures, all of the Standards for Rangeland Health were met in the allotment.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action alternative incorporates livestock management changes and project development to improve forage conditions on several small seeding pastures as well as protect a public land portion of Jack Creek from continued seasonlong use by livestock and wild horses. The project package would also provide a reliable water source for livestock and wild horses during periods of drought within the East Warm Springs Allotment.

The proposed action is to implement the following grazing management actions that would address the resource concerns identified in the East Warm Springs Allotment evaluation.

1. Create an additional spring use pasture (Weed Lake Pasture) which would be used from April 20 to June 1 every other year to help balance the forage demand with forage availability.
2. Schedule the rotation of all spring use pastures on a 2-year cycle to provide total rest

every other year in all spring use pastures.

3. Construct an exclosure fence along 1-mile of Jack Creek to improve riparian conditions in an area where there has been historic seasonlong use by livestock and wild horses.

4. Develop a livestock water well and pipeline to provide for offsite water away from Jack Creek for livestock, wild horses, and wildlife.

5. Reallocate forage which has been determined through an interdisciplinary allotment evaluation to be available on a sustained use basis to two existing permittees who have applied for the additional grazing preference.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

The proposed management plan and associated projects would improve grazing management and resources within the East Warm Springs Allotment. This proposal is in conformance with the 1992 Three Rivers Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS). It is in conformance with the objectives stated in the August 12, 1997 Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Livestock Management for Public Lands Administered by the Bureau of Land Management in the States of Oregon and Washington. It is also consistent with the Endangered Species Act, Section 2(c) and 7(a)1.

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts contained in the attached Environmental Assessment (EA) and all other available information, I have determined that the proposed action and the alternatives analyzed do not constitute a major Federal action that would significantly impact the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an EIS is not necessary and will not be prepared.

Rationale:

This determination is based on the following: The following critical elements of the human environment have been analyzed in the Three Rivers RMP/Final EIS, and are not known to be present in the project area or affected by enacting any of the alternatives analyzed: Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, Air Quality, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Special Status Flora, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Cultural Heritage, American Indian Traditional Practices, Paleontology, Floodplains, Prime or Unique Farmlands, and Hazardous Materials. Environmental Justice was not discussed in the Three Rivers RMP/Final EIS, but is either not known to be present in the project area or not affected by enacting any of the alternatives analyzed. All potentially impacted resources were analyzed in the EA specific to the proposed action and alternatives. The following resources were analyzed in the EA: Water Quality, Special Status Fauna, Wetlands and Riparian Zones, Migratory Birds, Noxious Weeds, and Grazing Management. Impacts to these resources are considered to not be significant (based on the definition of significance in 40 CFR 1508.27) for the following reasons:

Water Quality

As with many areas within the Great Basin, natural water sources are present for only a short period of the year, typically in the spring. There are only a few natural water sources which last through the summer found within the allotment. These water sources are associated with potholes in the Jack Creek drainage. Over the years, waterholes and reservoirs have been constructed to provide for water throughout the allotment. Agency actions are not known to impact water quality within the allotment.

Special Status Fauna

Long-billed curlew, snowy plover, and greater sage-grouse and their habitat are present within the East Warm Springs Allotment. Pygmy rabbits are also known to be present within the allotment.

Migratory northern bald eagles (Federal Threatened) pass over the area annually. Golden eagles and ferruginous hawks are known to nest within the allotment. Red-tailed hawks, Swainson's hawk, American kestrels, and other raptors are common to the area and may also nest in some areas within the allotment.

Long-billed curlew would benefit from improved management on the small seeding pastures on the north end of the allotment. Deferment of the Native Pasture until after June 1 annually will provide for greater sage-grouse habitat needs for spring forbs and early brood-rearing habitat. Pygmy rabbits would not be affected by the proposed action.

Wetlands and Riparian Zones

Riparian and wetland areas associated with Jack Creek would begin to improve and expand following the construction of the Lower Jack Creek Exclosure Fence.

Migratory Birds

Migratory birds are known to use the project area for nesting, foraging, and resting as they pass through on their yearly migrations. The proposed action would likely benefit all or most of the migratory birds that use the area. Proposed projects would cause improvement in wetland and riparian conditions, thus, improving nesting, brood rearing, and foraging habitat.

Noxious Weeds

There have been four different noxious weed species documented in the allotment: whitetop, Canada thistle, Scotch thistle, and perennial pepperweed. Most of the current weed sites occur along roads and have been treated, primarily using herbicides. Any new noxious weed infestations are treated with the most appropriate methods. Vehicles and equipment used to implement the proposed action alternative will be cleaned prior to their use to ensure no new weed infestations occur during construction.
Long-term benefits of providing good condition riparian and upland habitat should discourage noxious weed establishment and spread in the project area.

Grazing Management

The creation of the Weed Lake Pasture will allow the area to be rested every other year from livestock grazing. Upland conditions would improve in the Weed Lake Pasture over time. Excluding livestock and wild horses from the public land portion of Lower Jack Creek, and its associated water source, would improve management control in the allotment. The Weed Lake Well would be controlled to regulate the timing of grazing in the Weed Lake area of the Native Pasture.

Other

1. Beneficial, adverse, direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts have been disclosed in the EA. Analysis indicated no significant impacts on society as a whole, the affected region, the affected interests or the locality. The physical and biological effects are limited to the Burns District, Three Rivers Resource Area and adjacent land.

2. There are no highly controversial effects on the environment.

3. There are no effects that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risk. Sufficient information on risk is available based on information in the EA and other past actions of a similar nature.

4. The proposed actions do not set a precedent for other projects that may be implemented in the future to meet the goals and objectives of adopted Federal, State or local natural resource-related plans, policies or programs.

5. The proposed actions are in compliance with relevant Federal, State, Tribal, and local laws, regulations, and requirements for the protection of the environment.

Joan M. Suther
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Date